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BIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW OF CASS, SCHUYLER and BROWN COUNTIES, Illinois - 1892

Chicago: Biographical Review Publishing Co.

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HON. LEWIS D. ERWIN, formerly of the Illinois State Legislature, now living in retirement in Rushville, was born in Plattsburg, New York, July 1, 1815. His parents were Cornelius M. and Lucinda (Fairman) Erwin, both natives of Vermont, the former having been born in Fairhaven, Rutland county, and the latter being a daughter of James Fairman, a man of some prominence in his State.

David Erwin, paternal grandfather of the subject of this sketch, was a native of Newark, New Jersey, and was an able soldier in the Revolutionary war. He was with General Washington at the second crossing of the Delaware river and at the retaking of Trenton. He afterward went from his native town to Fairhaven, Vermont, where he established a nail factory. In 1804, he removed to Franklin county, New York, engaging in the lumber business near Westville, and there spent the rest of his days. His wife, formerly Catherine Munson, and a native of New Jersey, also died in Franklin county.

Cornelius M. Erwin removed with his parents to New York State, and was engaged with his father in the lumber business in Franklin county. He was a resident of Plattsburg until the breaking out of the war of 1812, when he entered the service and was assigned to the Quartermaster's Department. In 1830 he removed to Ohio, then the frontier of civilization, locating in Birmingham, where he operated a sawmill, the country abounding with excellent timber. Four years later he went to Toledo, then a mere village, where he worked at blacksmithing for a short time, later engaging in the grocery business, in which latter occupation he continued until his death in March, 1837. His devoted wife died in Birmingham, Ohio, in August, 1833. They were the parents of six children: Catherine, David, Eliza, Lewis D., George W. and Phoebe.

Lewis D., whose name heads this biography, remained with his father, assisting him at the forge until he was twenty-one years of age, when he commenced life on his own account, engaging in clerking. He resided in the Buckeye State until 1839, when he removed to Illinois, making the journey by team, through a wild and sparsely settled country. He secured a position as clerk in Erie, then a small town on the Illinois river, in Schuyler county, which was quite a thriving little center. In 1841 he purchased his land in Schuyler county, near Littleton, on which he engaged in farming. Ten years later, he came to Rushville, which has ever since been his home.

Mr. Erwin was married in 1843, to Elvira Wells, an estimable lady, and a daughter of Charles and Elizabeth Wells. They had eleven children: David D.; Catherine; Matilda; Eliza; Elizabeth L.; Emma; Lewis D., born in 1859 and died in 1887; George L.; Anna C.; Sophie B.; and Edward, who died in infancy. In 1875 the family was called upon to mourn the loss of the devoted wife and mother, who had subordinated her interests to their welfare. She was a woman of rare Christian character, and much esteemed in her community.

The subject of this sketch cast his first vote for Martin Van Buren, ever since which time he has supported the principles of the Democracy. Being a leading man his constituents have conferred upon him various offices of trust and honor, the duties of which have been discharged with ability and fidelity. In 1844 he was appointed Deputy Sheriff, and in 1850 was elected Sheriff. In 1852, he was made Circuit Clerk, to which position he was re-elected in 1854. In 1846 he was elected a member of the Illinois State Legislature, his efforts in that body receiving universal commendation, as shown by his re-election to the same position in the years of 1856, 1858 and 1860, thus serving five sessions, including the extra session at the breaking out of the war.

Such universal endorsement makes further encomiums on his character and qualifications unnecessary, as they are so plainly indicated that "he who runs may read."

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